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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7627  
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0722  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 7711  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 5892  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4242  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1811  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 4251  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3347  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 8317  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 0369  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5812  
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0528  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION PRIORITY  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000114

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/30/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: RISING VIOLENCE IN NORTH KILLS STUDENTS  
ON BUS, PREVENTS DEFENSE SECRETARY FROM LANDING IN JAFFNA

Classified By: DCM James R. Moore. Reasons: 1.4 (b, d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: An LTTE artillery bombardment of the Palaly base near Jaffna thwarted an attempt by Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa and Army Commander Sarath Fonseka to land there on January 28, forcing their aircraft to return to Colombo. Government forces responded by bombing the LTTE artillery position on Pooneryn peninsula. On January 29, an attack by a claymore mine on a school bus in the Madhu Church area near Mannar claimed the lives of 18, including twelve children. Despite government denials, it appears likely that the incident resulted from faulty targeting of the vehicle by a Sri Lankan Army Deep Penetration Unit. End summary.

12. (C) A Sri Lankan Army unit reportedly triggered a claymore mine on a civilian bus carrying school children in an area controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Mannar District, Northern Province on January 29. The attack killed 18, including twelve students and two teachers. Seventeen passengers were injured. While the Sri Lankan government continues to claim publicly that the attack was an attempt by the LTTE to "tarnish the image of the military," and insists that the "LTTE should take responsibility for it," the Government Agent in Mannar (strictly protect) told post that a Sri Lankan Army Deep Penetration Unit was responsible.

13. (U) The explosion is part of an ongoing expansion of violence in the LTTE-held Mannar District, which the government is attempting to take as part of its offensive to wrest control of territory in the northwest and north. The Army claimed to have taken 16 bunkers and killed 22 LTTE rebels in the Mannar District on January 29 and reported seizing control of LTTE positions on the Forward Defense Line near Jaffna on January 30. It is not possible independently to verify these claims. The casualty figures given by both sides are also not reliable. (Note: independent confirmation of military incidents is generally no longer possible in the wake of the government's withdrawal from the ceasefire agreement in early January and the closure of the Sri Lanka

Monitoring Mission.)

14. (SBU) The Sri Lankan NGO Foundation for Co-Existence (FCE) reported in a January 30 briefing that there are now more than 26,000 Internally Displaced Persons in Mannar District, and there were at least nine abductions and 20 killed in the area in December and January. (Note: Embassy believes these figures may be low.) FCE also reports that although there is no official curfew in Mannar, civilians do not travel after 7:00 pm, and buses in the area stop running at 5:00 pm. Fishermen and farmers are prevented from carrying out their professions because of restrictions on access to "High Security Zones" in the ocean and on land in the government controlled areas. There is now no direct trucking service from Colombo; all cargo must be unloaded and reloaded at three different places along the Colombo - Mannar route. Participants in the FCE briefing commented privately to Embosffs that they are surprised that the LTTE has not been able to react more forcefully to the government's escalation in the north and northwest.

15. (U) Further north, an LTTE artillery attack on Palaly Air Base in Jaffna on the morning of January 29 succeeded in disrupting air traffic and turning away an aircraft carrying Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa and Army Commander Sarath Fonseka. The aircraft returned to Colombo. The airfield, which handles both civilian and military aircraft, was closed for several hours.

16. (C) COMMENT: The bus attack was likely a mistaken targeting on the part of the Sri Lankan Army, which has been intent on taking control the area around the Madhu Church for several months. The incident resembled an attack in

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September, in which a Catholic priest was killed by a claymore that targeted the vehicle he was traveling in to deliver relief supplies. In a similar attack on a bus on November 27, the date of Prabhakaran's Heroes' Day speech, the GSL again attempted to point the finger publicly at the LTTE.  
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